



Family Frenzies

By Penny Woods

Fat Nose

What would we do without nicknames? They are an accepted mark of our culture. These tags of endearment make us smile or shudder.

In our family the nickname habit has gone rampant. Mother is to blame. In her day she bestowed upon her five children nicknames of various animals. If we weren't bunnies, rabbits, or deer, we were busy bees or lazy sloths. Poor table manners earned us pig aliases. Silly antics identified us as monkeys. By the time we left home we had quite a zoo going, thanks to Mother Mouse.

My younger brothers, who were not allowed to cuss, began calling each other Fat Nose. Now several decades removed from childhood, they still refer to each other and even their wives as Fat Nose, depending on the occasion.

During our school days nicknames were a sign of popularity, good or not so good. At least you were recognized. We

felt a little sorry for the kids in high school who never earned a special title. They remained without distinction.

There was "Rhino," the hard-headed athlete who gained his fame name by going head to head with the goal post at a football game.

We recall "Slob" who never tucked in his shirt and missed his mouth with his lunch food, as well as others like "Buns," "Baldy," and the obnoxious teacher, "Potatohead."

By college, nicknames were expected. I remember a boy at the freshman dance who introduced himself.

"Hi. I'm Aimel Tamel," he said.

"Oh, no you're not," I declared and burst out laughing. "What is your real name?"

Alas, it was.

Our first child we designated "The Blob." Later, we called him "Fats." As a teenager he graduated to "Beanpole." My children earned new nicknames when they ate, ("Fudgeface"),

bathed ("Super suds"), and took up sports ("Air Ball"). The dog has always been "Nacho Corn Chip".

At times nicknames grow out of proportion. Fat Nose can become the name of choice for all males in a family. The Christmas reunion is not complete without a Fat Nose Photograph in which everyone is wearing a tie-on Fat Nose and a Nose Power button on his T-shirt.

Often there is a price to be paid for being party to such nicknaming. This can happen at the airport when 6 people meet our flight wearing a variety of animal noses.

Now that my children are grown, the nicknaming continues. New names appear when warranted. One son came by to visit recently when I was having a particularly bad-face day. As he departed, he leaned down to give me a goodbye hug, and dropped a new nickname on his mother.

This is "Crinkles" signing off.

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Weights Work

I live in a house of males, including the dog and cat. The time eventually comes in a family when it is necessary to throw one's weight around in order to be heard. I decide to sign up for a "Women in Strength" class at the local "Y."

The first intimidation we face is the form-fitting fuchsia leotard worn by our instructor. "Stick with the program three times a week," promises our

petite but compact instructor as she demonstrates warm-up crunches. "and you will notice a definite difference after 30 days."

I wonder if that difference will be that I feel very tired.

Next, are the monstrous machines themselves. They resemble an assortment of giant steel mousetraps waiting for their victims. Each machine radiates its unique snare of pulleys and hinges, stacks of

weighted blocks, and a pitfall of knobs to adjust.

"When you walk into this weight room," says our instructor, "I want to see good posture. Pull in those abdominals." (This is an euphemism for stomach mass). "Workouts here carry over into your everyday life."

My posture will be the envy of all in the grocery store line.

First I try rotary torso, the leg extension and the chest press.

It is no problem remembering these machines since their names are synonymous with torture during the Inquisition.

"Remember to bring your water bottle," insists the instructor. "You are going to be sweating."

I am already sweating just watching the others.

I learn that hefting and heaving in the weight room cannot rid my body of cellulite, but at least it will max out. Stronger muscles beneath the cellulite area will change my bouncy pockets of fat to a cluster of friendly dimples. Will fellow bathers at the

beach this summer recognize this relevant difference?

"After you begin lifting 50 percent of your body weight, purchase a weight belt," says the instructor. The wide leather belt cinches tightly around your lower waist and helps prevent injury to the back muscles and vertebrae as you push and pull. Why didn't someone tell me this when I was lugging around fat babies, who, unlike docile weights, wiggled and screamed as well?

"Next week you will try the free weights," she continues. (This means you are free to use them if you are strong enough).

"Buy weight gloves so you won't develop large calluses on your hands."

Too late. I already have plenty of calluses on my hands—and knees too—from scrubbing floors, washing cars, and carrying in the firewood, but I planned to buy the gloves anyway just to use around the house.

In 30 days I will be just another fuchsia leotard who has graduated to a genuine "Woman in Strength." My family had better not mess with me.

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Who's In The Driver's Seat?

Every wife feels shivers creep up her spine when she hears the simple warning statement from her husband as he heads toward the garage, "I'm backing the car out." The subliminal message here is: "You had better be in it in 30 seconds flat or I will drive off without you."

This is simply another finger of the iron hand covered by the velvet glove. One is led to believe that favor is being bestowed upon one as if one's carriage is being readied for the ball. However, experience has shown that this is not the case. Instead, we see a horsepower play in overdrive.

My husband starts the car, warms it up, then backs it out of the garage. In the past, he has been in such a hurry that he has occasionally hit a tree. Next, he leans on the horn and assumes I will come wafting out of the house dressed in sequins and smiles, forgetting that minutes earlier I was elbow deep in dishwater and

wearing dungarees.

Because he is determined to get places on time, my husband starts the car moving almost before I can get in it. I, however, am equally determined to save my right shoe which is by now dragging along the asphalt as I attempt to slam the passenger door. (This explains all the chipped heels in my shoe wardrobe.)

As the car lurches forward, I hang onto the seat with my skirt hem stuck in the door, hot rollers in my hair, and 2 mismatched earrings clenched between my teeth.

Once I tried using the shock treatment on my husband in order to curb his impatience. I walked out to the waiting car barefoot and bathrobed.

"New outfit?" he asked, and adjusted the rear-view mirror.

It is true I could back the car out myself. However, the record shows that I have clipped off a few side mirrors in my time and gouged the garage door jamb when the fit was a

tad close—but I never hit a tree.

As a child, I recall my father was in charge of every aspect of the family car. He selected it, paid for it, and serviced it. He named the car, chose a personalized license plate, and picked the radio stations. But my father never honked for my mother. Of course, Mother never even drove a car. I realized her eyesight was fading when the family drove near the red fire hydrant on our street and Mother said, "What is your brother doing outside without his coat on?"

Also, my mother claimed she was too nervous to learn to drive, but I realize now that she was merely thinking ahead. She avoided any auto anxieties with my father by always beating him into the car and waiting quietly in the passenger seat. She sat in her carriage and he took pleasure in chauffeuring to many a ball.

It's easy to see who was in the driver's seat.

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